

From Linz to Tsebelis: Three Waves of Presidential/Parliamentary Studies?

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Summary

The debate about the relative merits of presidentialism and parliamentarism has a long history, but it was revived in 1990 with Juan Linz's articles about the supposed perils of presidentialism and the virtues of parliamentarism. The argument presented in this review is that we are now witnessing a 'third wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies since 1990. The 'first wave' began with Linz's articles. It was characterised by a debate in which there was one explanatory variable (the regime type) and one dependent variable (the success of democratic consolidation). The 'second wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies began around 1992-93. In the 'second wave' there is more than one explanatory variable (the regime type, usually, plus the party system and/or leadership powers) and often a different dependent variable ('good governance' as opposed to democratic consolidation). The 'third wave' is quite different. This work is informed by more general theories of political science. Here, the respective merits of presidential and parliamentary regimes are not necessarily the sole focus of the work. However, its

overarching approach informs the debate in this area in a more or less direct manner. The argument in this review article is that the 'third wave' of studies has much to offer the ongoing debate about the relative merits of presidentialism and parliamentarism.

The debate about the relative merits of presidentialism and parliamentarism has continued for more than a century. So, for example, writing in the latter part of the 19th century, Walter Bagehot and Woodrow Wilson both argued in favour of parliamentarism.¹ During the Second World War there was heated debate in the US, during which Don Price defended presidentialism and Harold Laski acted as an external moderator arguing, in a typically passionate manner, that neither system was intrinsically better than the other.² In many respects, the points made in these debates, and many others like them, are still present in much of the work on this topic today. For example, Bruce Ackerman has recently written a review essay in which he argues in favour of parliamentarism in ways that would be entirely familiar to the great writers of the past.³ In short, there is no doubt that the debate about presidentialism and parliamentarism has a long and distinguished history and that it is associated with some of the most respected and well-known intellectuals and political actors of the age.

That said, this review focuses on the study of presidentialism and parliamentarism only since 1990. While good work was conducted in the years immediately prior to this date,⁴ this starting point is, hopefully, uncontroversial.

It marked a new era of democratic government, most notably in Central and Eastern Europe and the former USSR, whereby many countries had to make difficult constitutional choices about which form of government to adopt. Moreover, it also marked the publication of Juan Linz's seminal articles in *Journal of Democracy* in which he outlined the supposed perils of presidentialism and defended the apparent virtues of parliamentarism.⁵ These articles sparked an immediate reaction⁶ as well as a debate that is still ongoing.

The argument presented in this review is that we are now witnessing a 'third wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies since 1990. The 'first wave' began with Linz's articles. It was characterised by a debate in which there was one explanatory variable (the regime type) and one dependent variable (the success of democratic consolidation). The work associated with the 'first wave' lasted through to the mid-1990s and even beyond. However, for the most part it was confined to the very early years of the period in question. The 'second wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies began around 1992-93. It is associated with the highly influential work of scholars such as Matthew Shugart and John Carey and Scott Mainwaring and it continues to this day.⁷ The two defining features of the 'second wave' are that there is more than one explanatory variable (the regime type, usually, plus the party system and/or leadership powers) and often a different dependent variable ('good governance' as opposed to democratic consolidation). The 'third wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies is quite different. This work is informed by more general theories of political science.

Here, the respective merits of presidential and parliamentary regimes are not necessarily the sole focus of the work. However, its overarching approach informs the debate in this area in a more or less direct manner. In one respect, the 'third wave' begins in 1995 with George Tsebelis's first article about veto players and regimes types.⁸ However, we see the full expression of this work somewhat later, most notably with George Tsebelis's book on veto players and Kaare Strøm's work on the chain of delegation in parliamentary democracies.⁹

The rest of this paper examines each of the three 'waves' of presidential/parliamentary studies in turn. It should be stressed that the terms 'first wave' etc. are not used here to define discrete periods of study. While they are associated with a certain temporal sequence, they are mainly used as an organising device and work associated with the 'second' wave existing alongside 'third' wave work in recent years. It should also be stressed that this review article stays strictly within the 'institutionalist' canon of academic literature, or, more specifically, what Guy Peters might call the field of 'empirical institutionalism'.¹⁰ In so doing, this paper does not engage with the debate about whether culture, society, or the economy provide better explanations of political behaviour than institutional variables. They may do, but the article is based on the simple assumption that institutions matter and examines the ways in which different writers have argued that they matter. In addition, it should also be stressed that the article does not address the 'upstream' issue of institutional choice, or why countries chose presidentialism, parliamentarism, or some other

type of regime altogether. Instead, the focus is on the 'downstream' issue of the consequences of institutional choice.

1. The 'first wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies: Linz's seminal articles

The 'first wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies began with Linz's work in *Journal of Democracy*.¹¹ This was followed up in other publications, most notably his magisterial chapter in the volume edited by Linz himself and Arturo Valenzuela.¹² The theme of that work was that parliamentarism was more likely to lead to the successful consolidation of democracy than presidentialism. In this view, Linz was supported by such eminent figures as Alfred Stepan.¹³ By contrast, Power and Gasiorowski argued that the empirical evidence did not suggest that presidentialism was associated with a lesser likelihood of democratic survival than parliamentarism.¹⁴ Other writers widened the terms of the debate by identifying semi-presidential regimes and examining their impact on democratic consolidation.¹⁵ Even though there is a variety of work in the 'first wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies, the common element to it is the focus on one explanatory variable (regime type) and one dependent variable (successful democratic consolidation). Moreover, while there were dissenting voices during the 'first wave' of studies, there was a basic consensus that

parliamentarism was more likely to lead to the consolidation of democracy than presidentialism.

The work of Juan Linz is emblematic of the 'first wave'. For example, in his first main paper on the subject, Linz makes the focus of his study very clear. Like others, he is interested in "the relative merits of different types of democratic regimes".¹⁶ While Linz does make passing reference to what he calls "hybrid"¹⁷ regimes in Finland and France, he also makes it apparent that his main preoccupation is with parliamentary and presidential regimes and he provides definitions of each type of regime. As we shall see, in both this paper and subsequently, Linz notes that there are different varieties of parliamentarism and presidentialism.¹⁸ Even so, he argues that there are "fundamental differences" between the two systems and asserts that all "presidential and parliamentary systems have a common core that allows their differentiation and some systematic comparisons".¹⁹ Specifically, he states that a presidential regime has two particular features: the legislature and the executive are both directly elected and both are elected for a fixed term.²⁰ For Linz, "[m]ost of the characteristics and problems of presidential systems flow from these two essential features".²¹ In other words, the perils of presidential and the virtues of parliamentarism are intrinsic to the institutional features of the respective systems. This is the sense in which, for Linz, there is, in effect, just one explanatory variable: regime type.

In a review essay, Mainwaring and Shugart argued that across all of his work Linz identified five general problems of presidentialism: the executive and legislature have competing claims to legitimacy; the fixed terms of office make presidential regimes more rigid than parliamentary systems; presidentialism encourages a winner-takes-all outcome; the style of presidential politics encourages presidents to be intolerant of political opposition; and presidentialism encourages populist candidates.²² Whether or not he always emphasised all of these issues, Linz makes it clear what he believes the general effect of them to be. He states: "A careful comparison of presidentialism as such with parliamentarism as such leads to the conclusion that, on balance, the former is more conducive to stable democracy than the latter".²³ Moreover, this argument is made repeatedly and consistently. So, for example, in the well-known longer version of his classic article Linz concludes by saying that "presidentialism seems to involve greater risk for stable democratic politics than contemporary parliamentarism".²⁴ All told, whatever the merits of the argument, it is always clear what is at stake. This is the sense in which there is just one dependent variable in Linz's work, namely the stability of the democratic order.

The work associated with the first wave of presidential/parliamentary studies was remarkably coherent. The aim was to assess the effect of different institutional arrangements on the prospects for democratic consolidation. The conclusion was that presidentialism was less conducive to democratic stability than parliamentarism. This line of argument was adopted not just by Linz, but by

other writers. For example, Fred Riggs argued that the “frequent collapse of presidentialist regimes in about 30 Third World countries that have attempted to establish constitutions based on the principle of ‘separation of powers’ suggests that this political formula is seriously flawed”.²⁵ A similar argument was made by Stepan and Skach. They argued that presidential and parliamentary systems have “analytically separable propensities”.²⁶ For them, the “essence of pure presidentialism is mutual independence”,²⁷ which “creates the possibility of an impasse between the chief executive and the legislative body for which there is no constitutionally available impasse-breaking device”.²⁸ As a result, they argue that pure parliamentarism seems “to present a more supportive evolutionary framework for consolidating democracy than pure presidentialism.”²⁹ The overlap with Linz’s analysis is evident.

Even though there was a large degree of consensus about the perils of presidentialism in the first wave of presidential/parliamentary studies, this conclusion was not shared by everyone. For example, Power and Gasiorowski conducted an empirical test of the Linz’s thesis and concluded that “the choice of constitutional type (presidential or parliamentary) is not significantly related to the likelihood of democratic survival in less developed countries”.³⁰ Others writers took a different tack altogether and widened the terms of the debate. Most notably, Giovanni Sartori argued against both presidentialism and parliamentarism, seeming to prefer instead a semi-presidential form of government.³¹ Given that I have focused on semi-presidentialism elsewhere, I

will not dwell upon it here.³² Suffice it to say that, for Linz and most other writers at that time, semi-presidentialism was either an ill-defined or largely untried concept. Certainly, it was not one that many people recommended. Linz's view of semi-presidentialism was typical of academic thinking more generally when he stated: "In view of some of the experiences with this type of system it seems dubious to argue that in and by itself it can generate democratic stability".³³

In fact, perhaps the most telling critique of the first wave of presidential/parliamentary studies was written by Donald Horowitz very early on in the debate. Horowitz's paper was a direct response to Linz's article on the perils of presidentialism. Indeed, Linz's paper on the virtues of parliamentarism was published in the same edition of *Journal of Democracy* as Horowitz's article and the one was a direct rebuttal of the other. Specifically, Horowitz claimed that Linz based his empirical observations on a "highly selective sample of comparative experience, principally from Latin America"; that Linz assumed a particular system of electing the president, which is not necessarily the best system; and that separately elected presidents can perform useful functions for divided societies.³⁴ In the context of this paper, the significance of Horowitz's argument is that he emphasised the importance of factors other than those associated with 'pure' regime types. In particular, he argued that Linz ignored the impact of electoral systems. Horowitz stated that when parliamentary regimes use plurality systems, then they too encourage winner-take-all politics.

Overall, he argued that Linz's thesis "boils down to an argument not against the presidency, but against plurality election, not in favour of parliamentary *systems* but in favor of parliamentary *coalitions*".³⁵

Horowitz's argument is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it caused Linz to qualify his original argument. So, in his *Virtues of Parliamentarism* paper Linz stated: "I must stress that I did not argue that *any* parliamentary system is *ipso facto* more likely to ensure democratic stability than *any* presidential system".³⁶ This is true. He only argued that parliamentary systems were more conducive to democratic stability than presidential systems. Even so, the emphatic tone of Linz's original paper, and his subsequent work, was such that Horowitz can be forgiven for suggesting that Linz's support for parliamentarism was largely unconditional. Secondly, Horowitz's paper is also significant because it presaged the 'second wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies. In one sense, this 'second-wave' work 'fleshed out' Horowitz's initial thinking in a rigorous and systematic manner. In so doing, its main contribution was that it emphasised the need to focus on more than one explanatory variable.

2. The 'second wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies: executive powers, party systems and good governance

The 'second wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies begins with the work of Matthew Shugart and John Carey and Scott Mainwaring.³⁷ The main theme of

this work is that the early debate about presidentialism and parliamentarism was misguided because it focused only on the supposedly 'pure' characteristics of each regime type. Instead, the fundamental institutional features of regime types needed to be analysed in conjunction with other institutional variables: the powers of the executive, the party system, and/or the electoral system. In other words, the defining feature of this work is that there is more than one explanatory variable. As a result, what is common to the 'second wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies is that writers usually emphasise the variety of institutional practice that occurs within presidential and parliamentary regimes. Many of them were also more favourable to 'properly constructed' presidential regimes than writers such as Linz. A second feature of the 'second wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies is that writers have increasingly focused not only on the link between institutional design and democratic consolidation but also on more general issues of good governance. As a result, the 'second wave' is now usually associated with a different dependent variable than the 'first wave'.

The first element of the 'second wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies is the emphasis placed on a wider set of institutional variables than just the supposedly 'essential' features of presidential and parliamentary regimes. In this regard, Scott Mainwaring's work is exemplary. Writing around the same time as Linz's seminal article, Mainwaring stressed that "the combination of presidentialism and a fractionalized multi-party system seems especially inimical

to democracy".³⁸ However, a much more clearly articulated and rigorous expression of this argument was published three years later. In this latter article, Mainwaring demonstrates that in the period 1967-92 very few stable democracies had presidential systems.³⁹ Thus, he agrees with the general argument that presidentialism is less likely to promote stable democracy than parliamentarism.⁴⁰ However, having done so, he then re-examines the set of stable democracies and concludes that there is a correlation between stable presidential democracies and two-party systems. This finding leads him to his oft-cited conclusion that "multipartism and presidentialism make a difficult combination".⁴¹ The reason why, he argues, is that in presidentialism systems multipartism increases the likelihood of both executive/legislative deadlock and ideological polarisation and that it also makes interparty coalition building more difficult.⁴² Overall, while Mainwaring acknowledges that social, cultural and economic conditions "also affect prospects for democracy",⁴³ his main contribution is the argument that "the combination of presidentialism and multipartism makes stable democracy difficult to sustain".⁴⁴

Around the same time, a similar type of argument was made by Shugart and Carey. They begin their book by acknowledging the basic difference between presidential and parliamentary systems, namely that in the latter there are "two agents of the electorate: an assembly and a president".⁴⁵ However, having done so, they immediately sum up their most important contribution to the debate when they say that "there are myriad ways to design constitutions that vary the

relationship of the voters' two agents to one another, as well as to the electorate".⁴⁶ In subsequent chapters, they illustrate this point by 'measuring' the powers of popularly elected presidents. They do so by looking at the legislative powers of presidents (for example, whether they can veto bills passed by the legislature) and their non-legislative powers (for example, whether or not they select cabinet members). What they find is "reason to believe that the more powerful presidencies are also the more problematic".⁴⁷ Specifically, they argue that "regimes with great presidential legislative powers are problematic, as are those in which authority over cabinets is shared between assembly and president".⁴⁸ Whatever the specificities of the argument, the key point is that, like Mainwaring, Shugart and Carey focus on a combination of institutional variables. This emphasis clearly differentiates their work from the 'first wave'.

The focus on more than one explanatory variable leads writers like Mainwaring, and Shugart and Carey to underline the false dichotomy on which they perceive the work of people like Linz to be founded. For example, Shugart and Carey wrote: "the preponderance of recent academic writing on constitutional forms has stressed the superiority of parliamentarism over presidentialism, considering only a dichotomous classification of regimes, as unfortunately has been the case in most previous discussions".⁴⁹ To redress the balance, Shugart and Carey distinguished between a number of different systems: presidential; parliamentary; premier-presidential (similar to semi-presidential regimes); president-parliamentary; assembly-independent regimes;

and regimes where there is a directly elected prime minister.⁵⁰ The difference between these institutional types was a function of whether or not the executive and legislative were independent of each other and the degree of power the president had over the cabinet.

In their collaborative work Mainwaring and Shugart make a similar but nonetheless slightly different point. Here, one of their main aims is to show that even within the set of presidential systems, there is still a tremendous variety of political practice. In their review of Linz's work, they make this point explicitly: "Linz's critique is based mostly on a generic category of presidential systems. He does not sufficiently differentiate among kinds of presidentialism ... Presidentialism encompasses a range of systems of government, and variations within presidentialism are important".⁵¹ Specifically, in their conclusion to an empirical study of presidentialism in Latin America, they argue that presidential systems "vary so greatly in the powers accorded to the president, the types of party and electoral systems with which they are associated, and the socioeconomic and historical context in which they were created that these differences are likely to be as important as the oft-assumed dichotomy between presidential and parliamentary system".⁵² The key point is that they argue that Linz, and others, were wrong to generalise about the consequences of presidentialism. In fact, they assert, these consequences vary from one presidential regime to another as a function of other variables.

This argument is now standard. In contrast to the early work on the subject, most writers now stress the variety of practice within both presidential and parliamentary systems and, hence, the potential similarities between the two types of system. For instance, in their recent review of the literature, Cheibub and Limongi identify three supposed differences between presidential and parliamentary systems: there is a majoritarian imperative in parliamentary systems; such systems are meant to foster cooperation; and they have a more centralised decision-making process, especially as regards the relationship between the executive and the legislature.⁵³ However, they then identify the ways in which parliamentary and presidential systems operate and conclude the following: "Parliamentary systems do not operate under a 'majoritarian imperative'; deadlock is not as frequent as supposed under presidentialism and is not absent from parliamentarism; coalition governments are not foreign to presidential systems and emerge for the same reasons as they do in parliamentary systems; decision making is not always centralized under parliamentarism and is not always decentralized under presidentialism".⁵⁴ As a result, they argue that the "reality of both parliamentary and presidential regimes is more complex than it would be if we derived these systems' entire behavior from their first principles".⁵⁵ Again, the difference between this work and the initial work of writers such as Linz is stark.

Another writer who might be associated with the 'second wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies is Arend Lijphart. Over the years, Lijphart

has been concerned with arguing that consensual democracies are better than majoritarian democracies.⁵⁶ Part of this project has included the argument that parliamentarism is generally better than presidentialism. Indeed, the tone of his chapter in the Linz and Valenzuela edited volume is reminiscent of the 'first wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies in this regard.⁵⁷ However, the vast majority of Lijphart's work has been concerned with the impact of multiple institutional variables. In this sense, his work resembles more closely the work of 'second wave' studies. So, for example, soon after the aforementioned chapter he argued that the combination of parliamentarism and a proportional electoral system was best.⁵⁸ Very recently, he has reiterated his support for parliamentarism, but only in the context of nine other institutional variables that also need to be considered when divided societies are designing their constitutional structures.⁵⁹ Again, this is consistent with the basic elements of 'second wave' studies.

In his most recent article, Lijphart asserts that there is still a consensus that parliamentarism is better than presidentialism.⁶⁰ All the same, the emphasis on more than one institutional explanatory variable and the observation that there is a variety of political practice within the set of presidential regimes led a number of 'second wave' writers to reassess the supposed perils of presidentialism. Consistent with Lijphart's above assertion, these writers have not tended to argue that presidentialism is inherently better than parliamentarism. Indeed, the perils of presidentialism are often explicitly acknowledged.⁶¹ Instead, they have

argued that presidentialism can operate effectively if it is combined with other institutional features. For example, Shugart and Carey were explicit in this regard. They argued that “presidentialism or premier-presidentialism properly crafted can exhibit conflict-dampening advantages ...”.⁶² Similarly, Mainwaring and Shugart concluded their critique of Linz’s work by saying: “Presidential systems can be designed to function more effectively than they usually have. We have argued that providing the president with limited legislative power, encouraging the formation of parties that are reasonably disciplined in the legislature, and preventing extreme fragmentation of the party system enhance the viability of presidentialism”.⁶³ So, while Lijphart may be correct in his overall assessment of the situation, the tone of much of the work associated with the and ‘second wave’ of studies is quite different from the work of people like Linz in this respect.

So far, the difference under discussion between the ‘first’ and ‘second waves’ has been solely that of the choice of explanatory variable, the former emphasising just one such variable and the latter focussing on a combination of institutional variables. Another difference lies in the choice of dependent variable(s). Many of the earlier writers in this debate focused solely on democratic consolidation. Indeed, this point also applies to many of the works of ‘second wave’ presidential/parliamentary studies, including Mainwaring, Shugart and Carey, Mainwaring and Shugart, and Lijphart. Even so, right from the beginning of the ‘second wave’ of studies, people also considered issues

relating to good governance more generally. Moreover, in so doing, good governance was not treated simply as a proxy for democratic consolidation. In other words, they opted for a different type of dependent variable. In fact, this is now the standard focus of 'second wave' presidential/parliamentary studies.

The shift in the focus from democratic consolidation to 'good governance' is first found systematically in the edited volume by Weaver and Rockman. They argue that the "distinction between parliamentary systems and the U.S. system of checks and balances ... captures only a small part of potential institutional influences on governmental capacity".⁶⁴ In addition, they wish to focus on other institutional variables as well, including electoral norms and issues such as federalism, bicameralism, and judicial review. In this way, Weaver and Rockman are clearly part of the 'second wave' of studies in that they wish to focus on a combination of institutional factors as explanatory variables. At the same time, though, their main concern is not with the impact of such variables on democratic consolidation. Instead, in the introduction to the volume, they make it clear that they are interested in "governmental effectiveness"⁶⁵ and "policy making capabilities" more generally.⁶⁶ By 'governmental effectiveness' they mean the "specific capabilities"⁶⁷ of governments and they identify ten such capabilities, including the ability to set and maintain priorities, to coordinate conflicting objectives, to make and ensure international commitments and so on. One of these capabilities is the capacity to manage political cleavages "to ensure that society does not degenerate into civil war".⁶⁸ In this way, their work may be

related to the issue of democratic consolidation, but only indirectly so. Overall, their dependent variable is much broader and very different from the one identified in the work considered so far.

In fact, as Kent Eaton notes in a recent review article, this sort of dependent variable has now become the norm.⁶⁹ So, for example, Matthew Shugart, who was one of the leading figures at the beginning of the 'second wave' of studies, has now adopted this approach. He notes that recently "there has come to be considerable speculation among political scientists as to the advantages and disadvantages of presidential or parliamentary democracy from a policy-making standpoint".⁷⁰ His contribution to this literature is to argue that in a large country and/or a country where there is a large inequality of development and/or wealth, then a certain type of presidential system may be advantageous. In particular, a presidential system where the presidency has strong reactive and sometimes proactive powers may mean that the "particularistic tendencies of a fragmented legislature can be partially counteracted".⁷¹ In so doing, Shugart argues, such a system may allow the more effective provision of national collective goods, including "lower fiscal deficits; deregulation of industry; free; trade; growth with equity; universal education and health provision; and other policies that broad swaths of the population rather than specifically targeted narrow constituencies".⁷² The contrast between these elements of 'good governance' and Shugart's previous emphasis on democratic consolidation as the dependent variable is clear.

Another recent study is even more explicit in this regard. In the introduction to their recent edited volume, Stephan Haggard and Mathew McCubbins rehearse the by now familiar criticism of 'first wave' studies. They state: "Although the relative merits and consequences of presidential and parliamentary systems have received substantial attention, we argue that this distinction between macro institutions is inadequate; explaining political outcomes requires greater focus on the details of institutional structure".⁷³ Accordingly, they identify four key institutional explanatory variables: the powers of the president; legislative institutions (bicameralism etc.); federalism; and electoral rules.⁷⁴ By the same token, they identify a number of dependent variables, none of which is related to democratic consolidation. They are: budgeting, privatisation and electricity regulation.⁷⁵ Having established the research design, in a subsequent chapter of the book Shugart and Haggard draw the, by now, equally familiar conclusion that presidentialism is not necessarily perilous. They state: "we have conceded that certain forms of presidentialism appear to have some of the weaknesses its critics have noted",⁷⁶ but they also argue: "presidential systems that provide for strong legislative backing provide the basis, at least in theory, for decisive, credible, and programmatic policy".⁷⁷ Overall, this volume and particularly the chapters authored by a mix of Haggard, McCubbins and Shugart might be taken as the existing state of the art of the 'second wave'.

3. The 'third wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies: veto players and principal-agent analysis

In many respects, work consistent with this 'second wave' is still ongoing. That said, it is possible to identify a 'third wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies. This can be traced back to the mid-1990s with George Tsebelis's first article about veto players and regimes types,⁷⁸ but fuller expressions of this work have only begun to appear somewhat more recently.⁷⁹ With 'second' and 'third' wave studies currently appearing simultaneously, it is important to distinguish between them. In essence, we can say that the 'second' (and 'first') wave of studies is (are) characterised by a discrete focus of inquiry using a more or less rigorous methodology, while the 'third' wave is marked by a discrete and rigorous methodology that is applied to a more or less focused set of inquiries. In other words, the focus in the 'second' wave of studies is presidentialism and parliamentarism. When examining this topic, writers have adopted a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. By contrast, work in the 'third' wave is founded on a very explicit methodological approach, whether it is veto players, principal-agent theory, rational choice institutionalism and/or the new institutional economics generally. On the basis of such an approach, writers have addressed many issues, one of which is the debate about presidentialism and parliamentarism.

The veto players approach was developed by George Tsebelis and is outlined most fully in his recent book.⁸⁰ This approach is an overarching theory of how political institutions operate. So, Tsebelis defines veto players as “individual or collective actors whose agreement is necessary for a change of the status quo”.⁸¹ There are institutional veto players, meaning ones generated by the constitution of a country, and partisan veto players, meaning ones produced by the political game, such as parliamentary majorities. Tsebelis argues that each country has “a configuration of veto players”.⁸² This configuration affects the outcomes of policy, generating a greater or lesser degree of policy stability. The degree of stability depends on the number of veto players, the ideological distance between them and the extent to which they are internally cohesive. On the basis of this logic, Tsebelis has applied the veto players approach to various aspects of political life, including the study of the European Union and the structure of budgets.⁸³ Moreover, other writers have been quick to adopt the approach and have applied it to an even wider range of topics, such as German economic policy.⁸⁴

In this context, one of the areas on which Tsebelis has focused is the debate about presidentialism and parliamentarism. In this work, he has explicitly criticised Linz’s method.⁸⁵ Specifically, he repeats Horowitz’s point that Linz’s argument about the perils of presidentialism is derived from a limited number of, mainly, Latin American cases. Instead, one of the key points that Tsebelis wishes to make is that in terms of the number of veto players there can be

similarities between certain types of presidential and parliamentary regimes. In particular, there may be a small number of veto players, or just one, in both presidential systems and parliamentary systems where power is concentrated in the executive. Equally, there may be similarities between presidential systems, in which there is a higher number of veto players because of executive/legislative balance and bicameralism, and parliamentary systems where there is a multi-party coalition.⁸⁶ This aspect of Tsebelis's analysis is entirely consistent with the general thrust of the work in the 'second wave'. However, the way in which Tsebelis reaches his conclusion is fundamentally different. Moreover, it is only one element of a much wider set of studies to which Tsebelis applies his approach.

A similar point can be made with regard to another approach. This can be classed under the general heading of 'new institutional economics', or more specifically the 'transaction cost' approach and principal-agent theory. The origins of the new institutional economics date back to Ronald Coase's work in the 1930s.⁸⁷ However, it came into vogue in economics in the 1970s and 1980s. The key assumptions of the new institutional economics are that institutions matter and that their consequences can be analysed through economic theory.⁸⁸ One element of this body of work involves transaction costs. In economics, this approach has been used to explain why certain transactions take place within a market environment, while others occur within a more hierarchical context.⁸⁹ The answer is that hierarchies are normally required when transaction costs, perhaps

resulting from incomplete information, are high. This approach is often associated with principal-agent theory. Here, one actor (the principal) delegate power to another actor (the agent) with the expectation that the latter will act in a way that is consistent with the preferences of the former. Consistent with the general thrust of the transactions cost approach, the decision to delegate is usually motivated by a desire to reduce transaction costs. Overall, this body of work is extremely broad. It covers various disciplines, including economics, political science and law. Moreover, even within political science, the principal-agent approach has been applied to a vast range of subjects, perhaps most notably the study of bureaucracy.⁹⁰

In his most recent work, Kaare Strøm has applied principal-agent theory to the study of parliamentary and presidential democracy. He views representative democracy as a chain of delegation. In this schema, the ultimate principal is the voter, who delegates sovereign authority to a representative, acting as an agent. In turn, that representative, now acting as a principal, may delegate his/her authority to someone else, acting as his/her agent. And so on. For Strøm this chain of delegation is inherently different in parliamentary and presidential democracies.⁹¹ In parliamentary democracies, voters delegate authority to representatives in parliament. They delegate authority to a prime minister and cabinet, who then delegate that authority to ministers as heads of government departments. Ministers then delegate their authority to civil

servants. By contrast, in presidential democracies voters delegate authority to both a president and representatives, usually in more than one legislative institution. The president then delegates authority to a secretary as the head of a government department. In turn, the secretary delegates authority to civil servants. At the same time, though, one or more of the houses of the legislature may also delegate authority to a departmental secretary by virtue of being part of the appointment process. Equally, the legislature may delegate authority to the administration, for example, by creating independent authorities. This situation is captured by Strøm as follows: "Representation begins with a multitude of principals (the citizens) and ends with a large number of agents (civil servants). In between, however, the parliamentary chain narrows down more than does the presidential one. Simply put, parliamentary delegation relationships take the form of a long and singular chain, whereas presidential ones look more like a grid".⁹²

This method of analysis is interesting for many reasons, not the least of which is that, in contrast to much of the recent work on the topic, it reasserts the distinction between presidential and parliamentary systems. For Strøm, there are inherent institutional differences between the two.⁹³ As a result, even though Strøm does not aim to determine which system works best, and even though he acknowledges that to understand how systems work we need to read the fine print of their constitutions and organisational rules, he is willing to argue that the two systems have specific advantages and disadvantages.⁹⁴ In particular, he

argues that parliamentarism is better at coping with the standard principal-agent problem of adverse selection, or the situation where the principal cannot be sure which agent is best for the job. Parliamentarism fares well in this regard because of the role of political parties that help to screen potential candidates before they enter the selection process. This may increase the likelihood of skilled and honest candidates being selected. By contrast, presidentialism is better at coping with the other basic principal-agent problem of moral hazard, or the situation where the principal cannot be sure how the agent is working after s/he has been selected. To the extent that in presidential systems there are multiple and competing principles controlling particular agents, then the opportunities for *ex post* monitoring are increased.

The work by Tsebelis and Strøm is indicative of the 'third wave' of presidential and parliamentary studies. At first glance, there may seem little that links the work of the two authors. For example, Tsebelis stresses the institutional similarities between presidential and parliamentary systems, while Strøm stresses their differences. On closer inspection, though, they are linked by their attempt to apply general theories of political analysis to particular institutional debates, in this case the debate about presidentialism and parliamentarism. This method separates their work from the 'first' and 'second' wave of studies. Moreover, the 'third wave' will not necessarily be confined to the work of Tsebelis and Strøm. These writers have presented the fullest expression of it so far, but there is plenty of opportunity for other writers to build on their work.

Moreover, there is also opportunity for other writers to adapt other general approaches and apply them to the specific issue of presidentialism and parliamentarism. In this regard, Thomas Hammond and Christopher Butler's recent deductive model of policy choice and policy change in presidential and parliamentary systems is a good example of where the future of 'third wave' studies may lie.⁹⁵

Conclusion

This article has identified 'three waves' of presidential/parliamentary studies since 1990, but waves that are not wholly sequential. Work associated with the 'second wave' continues, even though a distinct 'third wave' is evident. Moreover, there is a degree of overlap between the work in the three apparently discrete 'waves' of studies. For example, Haggard and McCubbins's 'second wave' study uses supposedly 'third wave' veto players analysis as part of its exploration of parliamentary and presidential systems.⁹⁶ Notwithstanding these points, I would argue that it is still useful to separate these 'three waves' as there is some temporal sequence to the studies and, in any case, each set of studies represents a different way of approaching the same problem. In addition, this way of organising the debate also helps to identify how the terms of the debate, and the state-of-the-art thinking about presidentialism and parliamentarism, has changed over time.

So, what are we to think about the state of presidential/parliamentary studies nearly a decade and a half after Linz's seminal article? Part of the answer to this question is that we know a lot more than we used to. For example, there is scarcely anyone who would now disagree with the assertion that institutions matter. More importantly, Linz's work, and the work of everyone who followed him, has helped us to understand better *how* institutions matter. In short, we now know that if we want to determine the consequences of presidential and parliamentary systems, then we also need to know something about the wider institutional context in which they operate. More than that, we also know which aspects of the institutional context we need information about: in particular, the powers of the president and legislature, and the electoral system. This does not mean that 'one-size-fits-all'. We cannot recommend one type of system in every case. However, we can say with at least some certainty that if highly divided countries adopt executive-centred presidential systems, then they are probably making a mistake. We can also say that other countries may not necessarily lose out from the adoption of a carefully crafted presidential system. To some, this may not be much of an advance, but at least it is better than nothing.

The other part of the answer to the above question is more controversial. What we think about the current state of presidential/parliamentary studies is at least partly a function of what we think about the current state of political science generally. I am sure that there are some people, maybe a majority, who believe the 'third wave' of presidential/parliamentary studies is either redundant

and/or incomprehensible. For instance, does Tsebelis's work tell us anything that the more established studies have not? Arguably it does not. If it does not, then why do we need to even try to understand concepts such as winsets, wincircles and yolks, never mind do the maths that underpins them? In short, if you do not like positive political science, then the 'third wave' of studies will leave you cold. By the same token, though, if you do like positive political science, then much, but not all, of the 'first' and 'second' waves will leave you equally cold. For example, from a positivist perspective it is virtually impossible to derive testable hypotheses from the 'second wave' and from the much-cited Weaver and Rockman volume. Indeed, Elinor Ostrom accused these authors of asking questions in a way that was "unanswerable"⁹⁷ and of finding answers to them that were "more vacuous than one would expect"⁹⁸ given the intellectual calibre of the editors and contributing authors.

For my part, studying the debate about presidentialism and parliamentarism for over a decade has led me to the conclusion that it is important to be as rigorous and systematic as possible in the analysis of institutional variables. To this end, I am more than ever inclined towards the 'third wave' of studies than many may be. True, this work may not tell us anything startlingly new, but at least 'third wave' writers adopt a method which means that we can be more sure than before that what we thought to be the case actually is. In other words, to my mind the advantage lies in the method, rather than the outcome. This conclusion can only be properly justified in the context of

a different article about the study of political life generally. Moreover, some of the 'second' wave studies are almost equally rigorous, including virtually anything written by Shugart, Carey, Mainwaring, Haggard and McCubbins. All the same, the controversial nature of this conclusion suggests that there is probably still some life in the presidential/parliamentary debate even after a decade and a half.

Notes

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